

FIRE UPDATE

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO BUSHFIRE ARSON

RESEARCHERS ARE FINDING OUT HOW TO REDUCE THE DELIBERATE LIGHTING OF BUSHFIRES

Bushfires can be started by a range of causes. Some are natural, some accidental and some are deliberately lit for malicious reasons.

The Bushfire CRC's Bushfire Arson Project is being conducted by researchers at the Australian Institute of Criminology in conjunction with the ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety. It aims to provide the research outputs that will help reduce deliberate and negligent fire lighting in Australian bushland environments.

The project has produced the report *Bushfire Arson: A Review of the Literature*, and continues to produce monthly *Bushfire Arson Bulletin*, a concise one-page summary of current issues in arson.

CURRENT PROJECTS

The Bushfire Arson Project is engaged in a number of research activities focusing on specific areas of arson.

Some of these include:

A spatial and temporal analysis of bushfires in Australia. Data on bushfires over a number of years have been collected from agencies in each jurisdiction, in order to

identify trends in fires, and to put bushfires into context.

Some initial findings from these analyses have been presented at Bushfire CRC conferences in 2006, however a considerably more detailed report is due to be published in early 2007.

Early findings include:

- It is likely that 30-50% of all fires are the result of deliberate fire setting, although in some areas it may be as high as 80%.
- Bushfires are more likely to be deliberately lit on a weekend rather than a weekday.
- Most fires occur in daylight hours, with deliberately lit fires peaking between 3-4pm.
- There is an additional spike in arson around midnight, mostly Friday and Saturday night.
- Regions that incorporate a metropolitan or major regional centre have a higher frequency of deliberate lightings.

A survey of arson prevention and intervention programs in Australia.

Researchers are currently conducting a survey of Australian programs that target deliberate firesetting in order to determine how they operate, who they target, and how well they work.

The aim is to develop a database of programs to improve networking and knowledge-sharing among practitioners and those involved in preventing such crimes. The report is due in late 2006.

Identifying Best Practice in Bushfire Arson Investigation. The initial phase, a National Roundtable with bushfire arson investigators, is being held in Canberra in October 2006.

In attendance will be representatives from fire and police services and land management agencies. The aim of the roundtable is to highlight future areas for research.

FURTHER RESEARCH

A number of additional research activities are planned, including:

- An examination of the offending histories and characteristics of those charged with arson;
- A survey of policies and procedures of fire services for identifying applicants who are at risk of being arsonists, with a view to developing best-practice guidelines; and
- Initial work on economic modelling of arson.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Bushfire Arson Project (Project C3) is being conducted by Damon Muller and Colleen Bryant at the Australian Institute of Criminology, in conjunction with the ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The *Bushfire Arson Bulletin*, the Bushfire Arson literature review, conference presentations and research posters on this project can be found at: www.bushfirecrc.com